

LTTE's Kattankudi Muslim Mosque Massacre (03 August 1990)

Terrorism knows no religious sanctity, nor does it care for lives of infants, children, women and clergy. This was once again proved eighteen years ago when tiger terrorists cold-bloodedly butchered 147 Muslim devotees, praying in mosques in the pre-dominantly Muslim town of Kattankudy, Batticaloa in the East.

The massacre at Kattankudy that shook the nation and drew worldwide condemnation was meticulously pre-planned and executed in secrecy by tiger terrorists who had disguised themselves as Muslim prayers and entered the Meera Jumma and Husseinia mosques when hundreds of devotees were attending Friday Isha prayers.

On 03rd August 1990, gun-carrying Tamil Tiger terrorists swooped on Muslim prayers inside the holy KATTANKUDY mosque and butchered 103 Muslim prayers including over 25 small children. The dastardly mass murder provoked condemnation from the international community.

Mosque Massacres Revisited

By Peter Cassie-Chitty

On Friday August 4, 1990 over three hundred Muslims, men and boys, were prostrate in prayer at the Meera Jumma Mosque, fifty yards from the Kandy Batticaloa Road. None of them were armed.

It was seven twenty in the evening and the town of Kattankudi was lit up. The prayers went on when there was a power cut throwing the mosque into darkness.

A stone thrown away from the Meera Jumma is the smaller Hussainia Mosque. There was a smaller gathering of approximately forty people here -- prostrate in prayer too. The power cut had been effected by the large group of LTTE



cadres on their murderous mission.

According to eye witnesses the raiders were dressed in battle fatigues, others in sarongs and tee shirts. They drove up in several white Hiace vans -- armed LTTE cadres.

A. I. Ismail was 55 then. M.M. Akbar was 16. Two men who survived the attack as fate disposed and told the tale. It was appalling.

The most crowded place

In Katankudi the population is denser than in any part of South Asia including Calcutta. In one and a half square kilometres live 50,000 people.

In August 1990 there had been agitation in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. Security was sparse and the Muslim and Sinhalese civilians living in the area were exposed to the aftermath of Black July 1983.

LTTE attacks had accounted for 14 Muslims on August 1 in Akkaraipattu. The dead men had their hands tied behind their backs with their own clothes and then shot in the occipital (back) region of the head.

Between August 2 and 3 of that year, fifteen other muslims were killed in attacks by the LTTE at Medawachchiya, Batticaloa and Majeedpuram. On August 4 they hit Katankudi.

I found the streets of Katankudi bare and all the shops closed. First impressions were that of a ghost town. Then when we reached the mosque everything changed. "This is a 'hartal'. We have closed shops to mark the ten years that our children and their mothers have suffered without the bread winners of their families. Some mothers lost very young children who had gone but to worship Allah", the trustee of the mosque, a tall, bearded middle aged man says in perfect English.

On the walls of the mosque are the



marks left by machine gun fire. The floor bears the markings of the grenades that were thrown at the worshippers. We spend some time listening to the voices that are strained with emotion. Young children and women cling to the windows of the mosque and wait to tell their stories.

Losses

Katankudi's narrow side streets are crowded with screaming children at play in the hot soft sand of eastern afternoons. They are as noisy as children anywhere in the world.

In 1990 Akram was the youngest most precocious at six, Ajimeel, Jaroon and Rizwan, were 10, Asroof the only boy who was 11, Dalhan Haris, Fauser Hassan, Arip, M. Ajimal, Makeen, Kamaldeen and Imtiaz were all 12 - Anas, Faizal, and M.B.Jawad 13 - Sameeen, Jaufer, Samath, Mohammed Fauzer, Safar, M. S. M. Jaufer were all 14, Fazlan was the oldest at 15. They went to the same schools and played together. Came to the mosque and prayed together.

Each neighbourhood has its own little mosque to permit the faithful to pray as mandated by the Word -- five times a day.

Then when the public address system sounds, calling the faithful to prayer the streets empty in a few seconds. They come to the mosque and wash themselves before every prayer. On August 4, 1990 they performed the same ritual. In their innocence they knew that something was wrong for attacks had been carried out on peace loving, hard-working Muslims.

The hour was grave. Everybody looked for Divine Intervention. The LTTE were on the rampage murdering unarmed Muslim civilians. The men in Katankudi had filed into the mosques and no one was on the streets to warn of the danger that lingered.

The witnesses say that while men stood guard at the doors of the mosques latecomers were



herded and shut inside. Then through the windows they were mowed down, gunfire drowning screams of "Allah - hu - Akbar". They were shot in the back, killed by men who respect nothing not even a place of worship.

The Muslims continued to be attacked despite President Premadasa's attempt to stop them by increasing the armed forces personnel in the Eastern Province.

Six days after the Katankudi massacre Armed LTTE men rounded up hundreds of civilian Muslims. Akin to genocide now. Their attempt at mass murder in Siyambalagaskanda failed when the Army turned up in numbers.

On August 18, however the LTTE launched another attack on Eravur and murdered 31 children, 27 women and 115 men. They then raided other villages unhindered and continued their reign of terror throughout the Eastern, Northern and North Central areas.

Mosques all over the country had now to be given armed protection. Then the State Minister of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs Mr. Aswer called on the Muslims to be calm and patriotic. God fearing and disposed to peace, the Muslims did remain calm.

Sinhala villages came under threat; hundreds were brutally murdered in Tantrimale, Weli Oya, Padhavia while the security forces chased phantoms.

The election of the People's Alliance Government in 1994 saw a lull. Calling the bluff off the LTTE President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga refused to budge in her conditions. The Security Forces now were given orders to protect the threatened villages from the LTTE.

However on September 17, 1999 the village of Gonagala was attacked and 52 people, including a number of very young children, were hacked to death in the stealth of the night.

A visit to that region was made recently by two



British Journalists, veterans at covering the fate faced by children in a conflict situation. Former paramedical officer, now photo-journalist and Scotsman Martin Klejnowski - Kennedy and Madeleine Leeson of the Reuters Foundation toured Batticaloa and the Eastern province. Both had visited every battlefield except Kashmir in the last four years. Gruesome scenes are nothing novel to them. One million people were murdered in 100 days in Rwanda and they have seen fields full of 15000 Somalis killed by Eritrean soldiers piled up in the desert sun.

But they were appalled at the brutality of the LTTE in the Meera Jumma and Hussainia Mosques and at Gonagala.

To be fair by all ethnic groups they visited Katankudi and Batticaloa where they met Tamil children whose parents had been killed by the security forces. On the last leg of the tour they met the children of Gonagala.

Kennedy and Leeson were very impressed by the professionalism and thoroughness shown by the security personnel at the check points. They came into direct contact with numbers of Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese civilians and have seen clearly that the LTTE does not represent the Tamil people but form a micro minority of terrorists.

Captions: 1) Spared. They were too young to be in the mosque in 1990. They lost their fathers and brothers. 2) Clinging to the windows from where the terrorists opened fire on unarmed Muslims. 3) The list of the men and boys massacred on August 4, 1990. 4) The battered walls of the mosque where machine gun-wielding Tigers committed genocide.







